

Traffic Safety News & Facts For Employers October 2002

- FHWA announced the winners of the 2002 national awards for traveler information web sites that provide vital information about safety and mobility to users nationwide. Recognized as the top traffic information sites in the United States were the Houston (TX) TranStar web site at <http://traffic.tamu.edu/>, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation traffic information web site at <http://www.dot.state.ri.us>, the Oregon Department of Transportation Trip Check web site at <http://www.tripcheck.com>, and the GCM Travel web site at <http://www.gcmtravel.com>, a cooperative effort of the Gary-Chicago-Milwaukee priority corridor partners: the Illinois, the Indiana and the Wisconsin Departments of Transportation. Content in the reviewed Web sites was evaluated on whether it presented information on current conditions, incidents, construction notices, high occupancy vehicle lanes, tolls, and the extent to which other useful information and links were provided.
- Need to find a National Association of Fleet Administrators affiliate? Looking for a back issue of *Fleet Executive*? Searching for a candidate for possible employment? Can't find the latest used vehicle survey? Check out NAFA's Resource Center at the new www.nafa.org. NAFA'S new Web site offers links to affiliates and lists them alphabetically and by category. Click on Publications for back issues of *Fleet Executive* and *FleetFocus*. Find information on advertising in NAFA's publications.
- In response to a mandate in the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act

of 2000, NHTSA issued a final rule to require clearer and simpler labels and instructions for child restraints. The final rule amends the current requirements for child restraint labels, and the written instructions that accompany child restraints. It is the third in a series of rulemakings to make safety information more easily understood by consumers. The rule requires warning information to be on a label similar in design to the improved vehicle labels required by previous rulemakings regarding air bag and sport utility vehicle rollover warnings.

- U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta said that the U.S. Department of Transportation is making it easier for the public and businesses to interact online with the federal government. The Department now offers a report at <http://regs.dot.gov> that describes significant transportation rulemakings currently under development and those recently completed.
- New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey is calling for a state law against the use of hand-held cell phones by drivers to be in place by January. Several bills are under consideration in the state legislature, and if such a law were passed, New Jersey would become the second state in the U.S. to enact such a measure. New York passed its cell phone law in 2000. Safety education, not a ban, is the answer to safer driving, said a spokeswoman for the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association, which sponsors advertising to promote safe driving. "You can't legislate common sense," she said.
- U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta announced incentive grants totaling \$49 million to states for implementing tough programs to combat alcohol-impaired driving and to increase the use of seat belts and child restraints. According to NHTSA, 41,730 people lost their lives in motor vehicle

- crashes in 2001. Of these, 17,448 fatalities were alcohol-related. Motor vehicle crashes cost the nation more than \$230 billion annually. NHTSA data shows that seat belts and child restraints save lives. NHTSA estimates that more than 11,000 lives are saved by seat belts each year and another 300 lives per year are saved by child restraints. The seat belt use rate in the United States is nearly 75 percent, and the child safety seat use rate for children under five is more than 91 percent, according to the June 2002 National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS).
- SUVs may be the most dangerous vehicles on the road, according to a study titled *An Analysis of Traffic Deaths by Vehicle Type and Model*, by the University of Michigan and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The study concluded that SUVs, or more correctly the drivers of SUVs, pose the greatest risk for all drivers.
- The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) has launched TranStats, a new website that provides access to more than 100 transportation-related databases. Users can explore the site by transportation mode or subject area, use keyword searches to find relevant data sets, and get online help. All data are indexed with a transportation thesaurus and links to other transportation research through the BTS National Transportation Library.
- Safety is not a major factor in retail buying decisions, according to a survey conducted by CNW Marketing/Research, a leading automotive marketing research firm. Safety ranked a distant sixth in factors buyers considered important when deciding which vehicle to purchase. According to the results, the most important factor, listed by 87.4% of all consumers, was the size of the monthly payment. Other important factors

were conveniently placed cup holders, 64.2%; luggage capacity, 56.5%; sound systems, 55.1%; and interior appearance, 48.3%. Safety was mentioned by only 45.1% of the respondents, just beating out tilt-steering at 40.8%.

- State DWI control systems of drunk driving laws, enforcement, adjudication, and follow-up don't work well to deter impaired driving, according to the authors of *Drunk Driving: Seeking Additional Solutions*. Drunk drivers have little fear of being stopped, arrested, convicted, and punished, so they continue to drink and drive, according to Jim Hedlund and Anne McCartt, members of the Preusser Research Group, who conducted the study for the AAAFTS.
- Several transportation experts recently testified at a House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure hearing on the benefits Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) have provided in reducing congestion and increasing traffic safety. The witnesses also spoke on the need for increased funding to help advance new technologies. Rep. Tom Petri, R-Wis., explained, "In many cases, it may be just too costly to expand our roadways, so we must find ways to make them work better. In addition, in-car advances-such as GPS navigation, collision avoidance systems, and E-Z Pass technology-are already bringing drivers important information and helping guide them around points of congestion."
- There is no strong evidence to support a ban on cell phones, according to a study by the AEI-Brookings Joint Center for Regulatory Studies. Although the study did show a "risk exists" by using either hand-held or hands-free cell phones, the risk is comparable to other driver distractions such as eating while driving or tuning the radio. Until these "more mundane" risks are regulated, it would be discriminatory to regulate cell phone use. The study promotes the idea of not using a cell phone for

"low value" calls that can be postponed until the driver has pulled off the road or reached his or her destination.

- In a recent research project, Hans Joksche of the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) found that in collisions with pickup trucks or vans, car occupants were exposed to a much higher fatality risk than in collisions with other cars. The controlled fatality risk for car drivers tended to increase with the weight of the striking vehicle, its higher height of center of force, and its frontal static stiffness, as measured in crash tests.
- More than one in 10 Americans, or 25.1 million people, reported driving under the influence of alcohol at least once in the past 12 months, according to a new Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) survey. This number is more than 3 million over the previous year. The *2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* also shows that the rate of driving under the influence of alcohol increased from 10 percent to 11.1 percent between 2000 and 2001. Among young adults aged 18 to 25, 22.8 percent responded that they drove under the influence of alcohol.
- In the new book *High and Mighty SUVs: The World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Get That Way*, author Keith Bradsher explores what he considers are the myths and realities of sport-utility vehicles. Bradsher contends that SUVs:
 - are no safer for their occupants than passenger cars
 - have worse brakes than passenger cars
 - are especially poor choice for teenagers to drive
 - have a rollover problem that goes beyond the failures of Firestone tires on Ford ExplorersFor more information on the book visit <http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/>.